Bull. Basrah nat. Hist. Mus.
Vol. 2 : October 1975

THE FIRST RECORD OF THE DRAGON FISH, *PEGASUS NATANS* LINNAEUS FROM THE ARAB GULF WITH NOTES ON ITS DISTRIBUTION.

NAJIM K. AL-DAHAM

Department of Fisheries, University of Basrah

Basrah, Iraq.

A dragon fish, *Pegasus natans* Linnaeus, (Fig.12) was captured on January 16, 1972 in the northern sector of the Arab Gulf, within the territorial waters of Iraq, at Lat. 29 38 N, Long. 48 50 E. This is the first record of *P. natans* from the Arabian Gulf. The fish has been preserved at the Natural History Museum, University of Basrah .It was captured by Zubaidi a shrimp trawler belonging to the Iraqi Ports Administration.

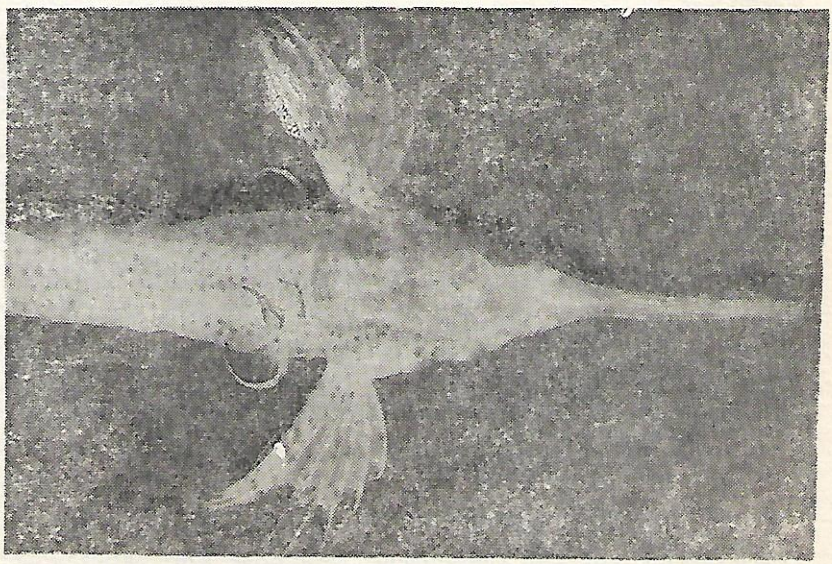

Fig. 1. *Pegasus natans* Linnaeus (dorsal view)

The presence of this species adds a new order, Pegasiformes, to those of the fishes of this region. The Pegasiformes (Hypostomides) are represent-

ed by a single family, Pegasidae. Although, many authors have split this family into more than one genus, others like Gunther (1870), De Beaufort and Briggs (1962), Smith (1965) and Norman (1966) included all the four or five species of the family in one genus, *Pegasus* Linnaeus. Although, these species are of no economic value, they are widely used in some countries of the Indian Ocean as curios and charms.

DESCRIPTION

Body much depressed, with greatest width at pectoral bases and deepest just posterior to them; body depth decreasing gradually forward and backward, where it becomes very thin at tip of snout anteriorly and at cauxal peduncle posteriorly, ·

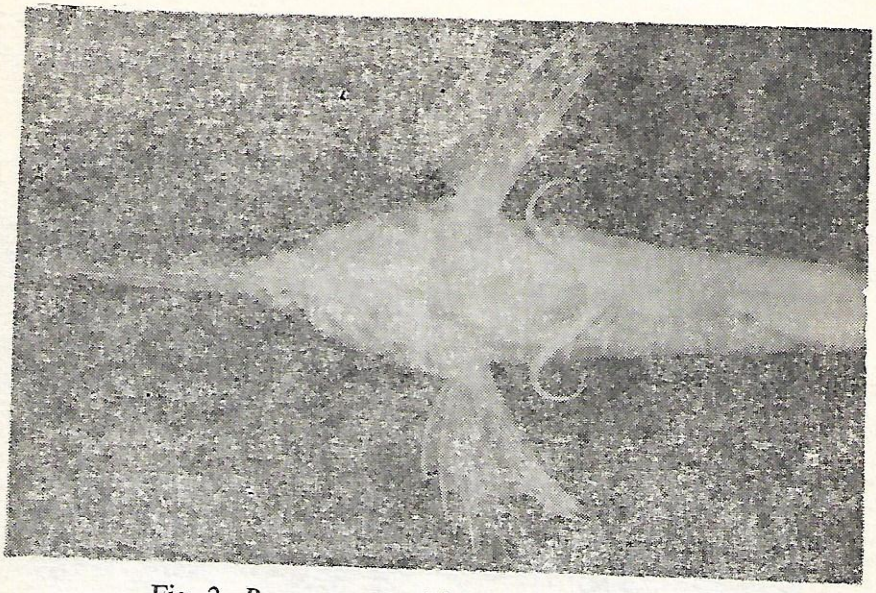

Fig. 2. *Pegasus natans* Linnaeus (ventral view)

Each side of trunk with a prominent lateral ridge. Both nasals united together and elongated to form a snout, extended as a long narrow flattened blade with very fine teeth directed backwards. Gill opening very narrow,

located as a slit in front of pectoral fin. Gill cover composed of large plate. Mouth very small, inferior, toothless and surrounded by premaxillaries. Occiput without pits. Pectorals horizontal, broad and composed of unbranched articulated rays. Ventrals curved filamentous, of one short spine and two unbranched rays. Dorsal and anal fins short, opposite, each with five rays, the first located on posterior end of second tail ring ,the second and third rays on third ring, the fourth and fifth rays on fourth tail ring. Length of first ray of dorsal slightly less than length of first ray of anal, but each of them longer than the rest of the rays, the latter gradually decreasing in length. Caudal fin small and truncate. Measurements in mm are as follaws: Total length 90; Standard length 82; Head length 26; Predorsal length 43; Preventral length 35; Postorbital length of head 5; Interorbital width 4; Length of dorsal base 6; Length of first dorsal ray 11; Length of last dorsal ray 4;Length of anal base 6 ; Length of first anal ray 9; Length of last anal ray 4; First pectoral ray 6; Last pectoral ray 12; The counts are as follows: Dorsal rays 5; Anal rays 5; Pectoral rays 10; Pelvic rays 3 Caudal rayl 8; Tail rings 12.

DISTRIBUTION

These are very small fishes living near the coast. *P. natans* has been reported from the coasts of the Indo–Pacific region, from Eastern Africa to Australia. Fowler (1956) erroneously listed this species from the Arab Gulf (Persian Gulf) and quoted Regan (1905), but this reference did not include the species in the list of fishes from the Persian Gulf but did with those of the Gulf of Oman (Muscat). The species has been described by Gunther (1870, 1880) from New Guinea, and Chinese and Australian coasts Fowler (1928, 1935, 1956) from Sumatra, China, and Northern Australia, Munro (1955) from Ceylon, De Beaufort and Briggs (1962)from Australia to Gulf of Oman, and Smith (1965) from South Afrca. The presence of this species in the Arabian Gulf extends its range farther to the north.

LITERATURE CITED

DeBeaufort, L. F., and J.C. Briggs, 1962. The fishes of Indo–Australian Archipelago. XI. Scleroparei, Hypostomides, Pediculati, Plectognathi, Opisthomi, Discocephali, Xenopterygii. E.J. Brill, Leiden. 48Ip.

Fowler, H. W. 1928. The fishes of Oceania. Memoirs of the Bernice P. Bishop Museum Vol. 10, Honolulu, Hawaii. 540 P., 49 Pl.

Fowler, H. W. 1935. A Synopsis of the fishes of China. The Hong Kong Naturalist. Vol. 6 (2): 132–147.

Fowler, H. W. 1956. Fishes of the Red Sea and Southern Arabia. Vol. 1. Jerusalem. 240 P.

Gunther, A. 1870. Catalogue of the fishes in the British Museum (Natural History). Vol. 8·549 P.

Gunther' A. 1880. The study of fishes. Adams and Charles Black, Edinburgh. 720 P.

Munro, I. S. R. 1955. The marine and fresh water fishes of Ceylon. Dep. External Affairs, Canberra. 349 P. 56 Pl.

Norman, J. R. 1966. A draft synopsis of the orders, families and genera of recent fishes and fish–like vertebrates. Trustees of the British Museum (Natural History). London. 649 P.

Regan, C. T. 1905. On fishes from the Persian Gulf, the sea of Oman, and Karachi, collected by Mr. F. W. Townsend. Jour. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc. Vol. 16:318–333.

Smith, J.L.B. 1965.The Sea fishes of Southern Africa. Central News Agency South Africa. 580 P., 111 Pl.